

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency



12 Tips for Reducing Solid Waste



Tip 1: Reduce the Amount of Packaging





ackaging serves many purposes. Its primary purpose is to protect and contain a product. It also can prevent tampering, provide information, and preserve hygienic integrity and freshness. Some packaging, however, is designed largely to enhance a product's attractiveness or prominence on the store shelf. Since packaging materials account for a large volume of the trash we generate, they provide a good opportunity for reducing waste. In addition, keep in mind that as the amount of product in a container increases, the packaging waste per serving or use usually decreases.





- When choosing between two similar products, select the one with the least unnecessary packaging.
- Remember that wrenches, screwdrivers, nails, and other hardware are often available in loose bins. At the grocery, consider whether it is necessary to purchase items such as tomatoes, garlic, and mushrooms in prepackaged containers when they can be bought unpackaged.
- When appropriate, use products you already have on hand to do household chores. Using these products can save on the packaging associated with additional products.
- Recognize and support store managers when they stock products with no packaging or reduced packaging. Let clerks know when it's not necessary to double wrap a purchase.
- Consider large or economy-sized items for household products that are used frequently, such as laundry soap, shampoo, baking soda, pet foods, and cat litter. These sizes usually have less packaging per unit of product. For food items, choose the largest size that can be used before spoiling.
- Consider whether concentrated products are appropriate for your needs. They often require less packaging and less energy to transport to the store, saving money as well as natural resources.
- Whenever possible, select grocery, hardware, and household items that are available in bulk. Bulk merchandise also may be shared with friends or neighbors.
- It is important to choose food services that are appropriate to your needs. One alternative to single food services is to choose the next largest serving and store any leftovers in a reusable container.


Tip 2: Adopt Practices That Reduce Waste Toxicity

 In addition to reducing the amount of materials in the solid waste stream, reducing waste toxicity is another important component of source reduction. Some jobs around the home may require the use of products containing hazardous components. Nevertheless, toxicity reduction can be achieved by following some simple guidelines.

 Take actions that use non-hazardous or less hazardous components to accomplish the task at hand. Instead of using pesticides, for example, plant marigolds in your garden to ward off certain pests. In some cases, you may be using less toxic chemicals to do a job, and in others, you may use some physical method, such as sandpaper, scouring pads, or just a little more elbow grease, to achieve the same results.

 Learn about alternatives to household items containing hazardous substances. In some cases, products that you have around the house can be used to do the same job as products with hazardous components.

 If you do need to use products with hazardous components, use only the amounts needed. Leftover materials can be shared with neighbors or donated to a business, charity, or government agency, or, in the case of used motor oil, recycled at a participating service station. Never put leftover products with hazardous components in food or beverage containers.

 For products containing hazardous components, read and follow all directions on product labels. Make sure the containers are always labeled properly and stored safely away from children and pets. When you are finished with containers that are partially full, follow local community policy on household hazardous waste disposal. If at any time you have any questions about potentially hazardous ingredients in products and their impacts on human health, do not hesitate to call your local poison control center.



Tip 3: Consider Reusable Products

Many products are designed to be used more than once. Reusable products and containers often result in less waste. This helps reduce the cost of managing solid waste and often conserves materials and resources. (Remember, reusable containers for food must be carefully cleaned to ensure proper hygiene.)

☀☀☀ A sturdy mug or cup can be washed and used time and again. Many people bring their own mugs to work, meetings, and conferences.

☀☀☀ Sturdy and washable utensils and tableware can be used at home and for picnics, outdoor parties, and potlucks.

☀☀☀ At work, see if “recharged” cartridges for laser printers, copiers, and fax machines are available. They not only reduce waste, but also typically save money.

☀☀☀ Cloth napkins, sponges, or dishcloths can be used around the house. These can be washed over and over again.

☀☀☀ Look for items that are available in refillable containers. For example, some bottles and jugs for beverages and detergents are made to be refilled and reused, either by the consumer or the manufacturer.

☀☀☀ When possible, use rechargeable batteries to help reduce garbage and keep toxic metals found in some batteries out of the waste stream. Another alternative is to look for batteries with reduced toxic metals.

☀☀☀ When using single-use items, remember to take only what is needed. For example, take only one napkin or ketchup packet if more are not needed.

☀☀☀ Remember, if your goal is to reduce solid waste, think about reusables.



Tip 4: Maintain and Repair Durable Products

If maintained and repaired properly, products such as long-wearing clothing, tires, and appliances are less likely to wear out or break and will not have to be thrown out and replaced as frequently. Although durable products sometimes cost more initially, their extended life span may offset the higher cost and even save money over the long term.

Consider long-lasting appliances and electronic equipment with good warranties. Check reports for products with a record of high consumer satisfaction and low breakdown rates. Also, look for those products that are easily repaired.

Keep appliances in good working order. Follow manufacturers' suggestions for proper operation and maintenance. Manufacturers' service departments may have toll-free directory assistance at 1-800-555-1212 to find out.

High-quality, long-lasting tires for cars, bicycles, and other vehicles are available. Using them reduces the rate at which tires are replaced and disposed of. Also, to extend tire life, check tire pressure once a month, follow the manufacturer's recommendations for upkeep, and rotate tires routinely. In addition, retread and remanufactured tires can reduce tire waste.

Mend clothes instead of throwing them away. Where possible, repair worn shoes, boots, handbags, and briefcases.

Whenever intended for use over a long period of time, choose furniture, luggage, sporting goods, toys, and tools that will stand up to vigorous use.

Consider using low-energy fluorescent light bulbs rather than incandescent ones. They'll last longer, which means fewer bulbs are thrown out, and cost less to replace over time.



Tip 5: Reuse Bags, Containers, and Other Items

Many everyday items can have more than one use. Before discarding bags, containers, and other items, consider if it is hygienic and practical to reuse them. Reusing products extends their lives, keeping them out of the solid waste stream longer. Adopt the ideas that work for you, add some of your own, and then challenge others in your school, office, and community to try these ideas and to come up with others.



☀️ Reuse paper and plastic bags and twist ties. If it's practical, keep a supply of bags on hand to use on the next shopping trip, or take a string, mesh, or canvas tote bag to the store. When a reusable bag is not on hand and only one or two items are being purchased, consider whether you need a bag at all.

☀️ Reuse scrap paper and envelopes. Use both sides of a piece of paper for writing notes before recycling it. Save and reuse gift boxes, ribbons, and larger pieces of wrapping and tissue paper. Save packaging, colored paper, egg cartons, and other items for reuse or for arts and crafts projects at day-care facilities, schools, youth facilities, and senior citizen centers. Find other uses or homes for old draperies, bedding, clothing, towels, and cotton diapers. Then cut up what's left for use as patchwork, rag rugs, doll clothes, rag rugs, or other projects.

☀️ Reuse newspaper, boxes, packaging "peanuts," and "bubble wrap" to ship packages. Brown paper bags are excellent for wrapping parcels.

☀️ Wash and reuse empty glass and plastic jars, milk jugs, coffee cans, dairy tubs, and other similar containers that otherwise get thrown out. These containers can be used to store leftovers as well as buttons, nails, and thumbtacks. An empty coffee can make a fine flower pot.

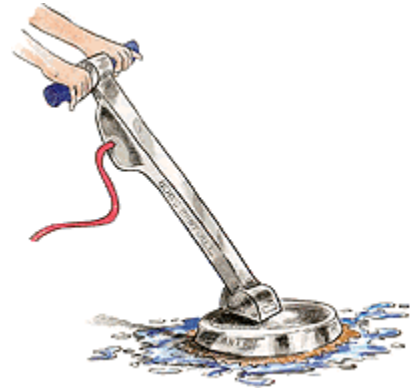
☀️ Turn used lumber into birdhouses, mailboxes, compost bins, or other woodworking projects.

CAUTION: Do not reuse containers that originally held products such as motor oil or pesticides. These containers and their potentially harmful residues should be discarded (following manufacturers' instructions on the label) as soon as they are empty. When you no longer have a use for a full or partially full container, take it to a community household hazardous waste collection center. Also, never store anything potentially harmful in containers designed for food or beverages. Always label containers and store them out of the reach of children and pets.

Tip 6: Borrow, Rent, or Share Items Used Infrequently



Seldom-used items, like certain power tools and party goods, often collect dust, rust, take up valuable storage space, and ultimately end up in the trash. Consider renting or borrowing these items the next time they're needed. Infrequently used items also might be shared among neighbors, friends, or family. Borrowing, renting, or sharing items saves both money and natural resources.



☀️ Rent or borrow party decorations and supplies such as tables, chairs, centerpieces, linens, dishes, and silverware.

☀️ Rent or borrow seldom-used audiovisual equipment.

☀️ Rent or borrow tools such as ladders, chain saws, floor buffers, rug cleaners, and garden tillers. In apartment buildings or co-ops, residents can pool resources and form "banks" to share tools or other equipment used or needed infrequently. In addition, some communities have "tool libraries" where residents can borrow equipment as needed.

☀️ Before discarding old tools, camera equipment, or other goods, ask friends, relatives, neighbors, or community groups if they can use them.


☀️ Share newspapers and magazines with others to extend the lives of these items and reduce the generation of waste paper.

Tip 7: Sell or Donate Goods Instead of Throwing Them Out





One person's trash is another person's treasure. Instead of discarding unwanted appliances, tools, or clothes, try selling or donating them. Opting for used and "irregular" items is another good way to practice source reduction. Such products are often less expensive than new or "first-quality" items, and using them will keep them from being thrown away.



 Donate or resell items to thrift stores or other organizations in need. Donors sometimes receive tax deductions or even cash. These organizations typically take everything from clothes and textiles to appliances and furniture. All should be clean and of respectable quality.

 Sell secondhand items at fairs, bazaars, swap meets, and garage sales.

 Give hand-me-down clothes to family members, neighboring families, or the needy. Consider acquiring used clothing at thrift or consignment shops. The condition of used clothing in these stores is screened: clothes are typically laundered and cannot have tears or stains.

 Consider conducting a food or clothing drive to help others. Where appropriate, encourage area merchants to donate damaged goods or food items that are still edible to food banks, shelters, and other groups that care for the needy.

Tip 8: Choose Recyclable Products and Containers and Recycle Them



When you've done all you can to avoid waste, recycle. Producing goods from recycled materials typically consumes less energy and conserves raw materials. Yet, our landfills are packed with many packages and products that can be recycled.



Consider products made of materials that are collected for recycling locally; in many communities, this includes glass, aluminum, steel, some paper and cardboard, and certain plastics. Check with appropriate community officials, volunteer groups, or recycling businesses to determine what materials are collected for recycling. If a system is not in place to return a certain type of material, that material is not easily "recyclable."

Participate in community recycling drives, curbside programs, and drop-off collections. Call community officials, the local recycling center, or a nearby recycling business to find out if and how materials should be separated. For example, some communities require that glossy inserts be segregated from newspaper, and that different types of cans be separated. A magnet can be used to distinguish steel or bimetal cans from aluminum cans (a magnet does not stick to aluminum). Also, investigate curbside pickup schedules, determine what materials are accepted, locate drop-off sites, and find out when these sites are open.

If a recycling program does not exist in your community, participate in establishing one. Call local salvage operators to see if they will accept or pick up materials for recycling. Work with community officials to determine the most cost-effective recycling options for your area.

Take used car batteries ("lead-acid batteries"), antifreeze, and motor oil (saved in clean non-breakable containers) to participating automobile service centers and other places that collect these items for recycling.

As more businesses and organizations provide collection opportunities, take advantage of them. For example, many grocery stores collect bags for recycling.

Tip 9: Select Products Made from Recycled Materials



Participating in a local or regional recycling program is only part of the recycling process. For recycling to succeed, recyclable materials must be processed into new products, and those products must be purchased and used.



Look for items in packages and containers made of recycled materials. Many bottles, cans, paper wrappings, bags, cereal boxes, and other cartons and packages are made from recycled materials.

Use products with recycled content whenever you can. For instance, many paper, glass, metal, and plastic products contain recovered materials. Some examples are stationery, wrapping paper, computer paper, and many containers. Many of these items are available in grocery, drug, and other retail stores. Mail-order catalogues, stationers, and print shops also may stock these and other recycled items.

When checking products for recycled content, look for a statement that recycled materials were used and, if possible, choose the item with the largest percentage of recycled content, if known. You can also call directory assistance at 1-800-555-1212 to obtain manufacturers' 800 numbers to find out how much recycled material their products contain.

Encourage state and local government agencies, local businesses, and others to purchase recycled products such as paper, re-refined oil, and retread tires. For the federal government, guidelines already exist that mandate the purchase of these and other products.

Tip 10: Compost Yard Trimmings and Some Food Scraps



Backyard composting of certain food scraps and yard trimmings can significantly reduce the amount of waste that needs to be managed by the local government or put in a landfill. When properly composted, these wastes can be turned into natural soil additives for use on lawns and gardens, and used as potting soil for house plants. Finished compost can improve soil texture, increase the ability of the soil to absorb air and water, suppress weed growth, decrease erosion, and reduce the need to apply commercial soil additives.



- Learn how to compost food scraps and yard trimmings. For more information, consult reference materials on composting, or check with local environmental, agricultural, or park services. Composting foods in highly populated areas is not recommended because it can attract rodents and other pests.

- Participate in local or regional programs that collect compostable materials. If no program is in place, contact public officials and community leaders about setting one up.

- If there's no room for a compost pile, offer compostable materials to community composting programs or garden projects near you.

- If you have a yard, allow mown grass clippings to remain on the lawn to decompose and return nutrients back to the soil, rather than bagging and disposing of them.

Tip 11: Educate Others on Source Reduction and Recycling Practices



Share information about source reduction, recycling, and composting with others. Spread the word to family, friends, neighbors, local businesses, and decision-makers. Encourage them to learn more about solid waste issues and to work toward implementing and promoting source reduction, recycling, and composting. We all have the power to influence others and help create the type of world in which we want to live.



Consider writing to companies to encourage them to reduce unnecessary packaging and the use of hazardous components in products. In addition, let companies know when they've made positive changes. Many companies offer toll-free 800 numbers you can call with these comments.

Encourage source reduction, recycling, and composting programs for yard trimmings in the community.

Where appropriate, encourage the use of reusable, recycled, and recyclable materials in the workplace.

Encourage the use of efficient, long-lasting equipment.

Urge schools to provide environmental education and to teach about source reduction, recycling, and composting.

Support an environmentally sound waste program in your community that starts with source reduction. Your community also needs access to adequate and safe solid waste facilities such as recycling and composting centers, combustors, and landfills.

Tip 12: Be Creative - Find New Ways to Reduce Waste Quantity and Toxicity



here are many ways to reduce the amount and the toxicity of solid waste. By thinking creatively, many new uses for common items and new possibilities for source reduction and recycling can be discovered. Here are just a few ideas. Now, try some of your own!

• Turn a giant cardboard box into a child's playhouse.

• Transform a plastic ice cream tub into a flower pot.

• Give pet hamsters or gerbils paper towel and toilet paper cardboard tubes with which to play. Use an egg carton to plant seedlings.

• Turn used tires (not steel-belted) into children's swings or other playground equipment.

• Select nontoxic inks and art supplies.

• Combine source reduction techniques. For example, try storing coffee bought in bulk in empty coffee cans.

• Choose beverages such as water or milk in reusable containers, where appropriate.

• Place an order through the mail with a group of people in order to save money and reduce packaging waste.

